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SUBJECT: NEW SECRETARY OF EDUCATION EMPHASIZES STRONGER MANAGEMENT
AND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRAINING

¶1. Summary. President Arroyo's impressive new Education Secretary outlined his priorities and received a briefing on USG support for education in the Philippines during a call on Charge August 28. Given President Arroyo's strong desire to improve English-language education to enhance Philippine competitiveness, the Embassy has formed a working group to develop synergies between USAID, Public Diplomacy, and Peace Corps programs, supported by the American Chamber of Commerce and other private sector organizations. End Summary.

Management Training

¶2. During an initial office call between Charge and Department of Education (DepEd) officials on August 28, new Education Secretary Lapus highlighted four areas he would welcome further USG support collaboration. Secretary Lapus started the discussion by underscoring that DepEd needs to improve its management. According to Secretary Lapus, "billions of pesos have been spent on studies. [DepEd] knows what the problems are; we know what the solutions are. We just need to implement them, but that takes effective management." Some studies advocate decentralization and "school-based management." The Secretary stated that management and fiscal reforms were his top priorities. However, he opined for that approach to work, principals and other local-level administrators need management training.

English Teaching

¶3. The Secretary discussed the problem of declining English language skills. He noted that 80 percent of public high school teachers admit they are not proficient in English. Moreover, while other countries in Asia are strengthening their capacity in English, language skills are decaying in the Philippines. Peace Corps Country Director relayed the desire to expand training for Filipino English teachers and place volunteers in positions where their English language skills will be optimally utilized. CAO noted that an expert in Teaching of English as a Second Language will be placed in DepEd as part of the English Language Fellow Program. USAID Director noted that USAID's education support program has been extended through 2011 and total funding has increased from \$35 million to \$85 million.

Electricity for Schools

¶4. Population growth and the movement of pupils from private to public schools (due to the cost of education at the former) have resulted in severe overcrowding. DepEd's short-term strategy is to have students attend either morning or afternoon classes. However, a significant number of schools have not implemented the two shift

system because they do not have electricity. USAID Director noted extensive USG support for rural electrification that is enabling growing numbers of students to study at night.

School Meals

15. Secretary Lapus urged USAID to revive the "school feeding" program active in 1960s-70s. DepEd officials said that when children come to school hungry, it affects their ability to learn. USAID Director noted that this program does receive some limited support through the U.S. Department of Agriculture PL-480 program.

BIO NOTES

16. President Arroyo described to Senator Inouye at a recent dinner how she selected Secretary Lapus to lead the largest and most challenging Department due to his management acumen and proven success. He is the fifth Secretary of Education in the last six years, but told us that he plans to far outlast his predecessors. Secretary Lapus has a background in business and government, serving

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for three terms as a member of the Philippine House of Representatives (1998-2007), Under Secretary of Agrarian Reforms (1987), as the President and CEO of the Land Bank of the Philippines (1992-1998). Lapus earned his Masters in Business Management from the Asian Institute of Management and Doctorate in Public Administration from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He completed post-graduate studies at Harvard University, INSEAD in France, and the University of California.

JONES